

The Lord's Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

Lord God, you have declared that your kingdom is among us. Open our eyes to see it, our ears to hear it, our hearts to hold it, our mouths to taste it, our hands to serve it. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 6:10 (NRSV)

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – The Lord's Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come

Food plays a vital role in the ministry of Jesus. Food plays a vital role in the work of the church because we are the body of Christ, and we, by the grace of God, continue Jesus' ministry.

The only miracle of Jesus found in all four gospels (outside of the resurrection) is the miraculous multiplication of loaves—to feed the hungry multitudes. The miracle was also a sign pointing to the spiritual reality that Jesus abundantly satisfies our spiritual hunger—that he is the Bread of Heaven that nourishes our spirits. Jesus cares about not only human souls, but human stomachs.

In many ways, Jesus' earthly ministry can be described as going from one dinner party to the next. And look at the company Jesus kept—he loved to hang out with the poor and forgotten in society—it got him into some trouble, in fact. Jesus is a Messiah for the Pariah. Jesus got into their world, ate with them, listened to them, treated them with compassion, healed them, loved them, identified with them.

This is the kind of king we serve and the kind of kingdom we belong to. Jesus instructs us in his prayer to pray to the Father for our daily bread. Not just *my* daily bread, but *our* daily bread. We pray to God for not only our needs, but the world's needs.

Food is a sacrament, too. We partake of the Lord's Supper together—setting aside the bread and wine from a common use to a sacred one. It's around the Lord's Table where the risen Christ is present with us in a very special way. The bread and cup become for us spiritual nourishment along our pilgrim's way. But really, *any time* we break bread together—we give thanks for God's provision and presence in our company.

The Scriptures teach when the kingdom of God is fully realized at the end of the age, it will be a Messianic banquet, filled with joyous celebration and rich fare. The honored guests are the poor, the lame, and the forgotten who are now remembered, restored, and rejoicing.

And from the parable of the sheep and the goats we see how vital our care for the poor is in God's kingdom. The royal law of love for the least of these is the law of this holy land.

The Scriptures show us that God's rule and reign is expressed not in power or opulence, but in compassion and mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the prisoner, and welcoming the stranger. Food is spiritual. Spiritual and physical hunger matter to Christ. It matters to us.

Three economists were just awarded the [Nobel Prize](#) in Economics for their work to alleviate global poverty. Husband and wife economists and MIT professors Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo and also Michael Kremer of Harvard have pioneered a paradigm-shifting approach to poverty reduction. They have taken seriously the cries of the poor and listened to them, "in all their complexity and richness." The husband and wife team have done this by creating carefully designed experiments that measure what really is effective and what isn't effective in the search to alleviate extreme poverty. Right now 700 million people live in extreme poverty. Twenty-years ago that number was twice that! Their research has helped put a huge dent in world poverty.

Banerjee and Duflo write in their influential book *Poor Economics* that there's a tendency in literature and society to reduce the poor to a set of clichés or extremes—that they're either lazy or enterprising, noble or thievish, angry or passive, helpless or self-sufficient. As a result, the poor are either admired or pitied. They remain a faceless statistic—a stranger that hasn't been welcomed. The husband and wife team have said it's "time to stop reducing the poor to cartoon characters and take the time to understand their lives." By coming close and asking questions and learning about the real lives of the poor, they've discovered fascinating realities in the fight against hunger and poverty:

- The poor don't need more grain for food (as many relief agencies traditionally have provided) as much as food that provides other nutrients lacking in their diet.
- The couple has found simple, thoughtful things go a long way: vital information communicated clearly such as: *How can I avoid the easiest way to get infected with HIV?* Providing salt that is also fortified with iron and iodine.
- They also learned the poor spend their money on what makes life more meaningful: in regions that emphasize festivals, the poor spend more on festivals.

In other words, meaning, relationships, joy, hope, and real life are crucial to human thriving—not just food.

These economists hold out hope that "poor countries are not doomed to failure because they are poor, or because they have had an unfortunate history". What often needs to be fought, they say, is "ignorance, ideology and inertia".

Each time we pray *Thy kingdom come*, we're reminded that God's kingdom is not a purely heavenly kingdom. *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Christians don't ask to flee earth to go to heaven. We ask for a little bit of heaven to come to earth. We ask God to come close to those in need. We care about what goes on "here below." We long for heaven and earth to become reunited—the New Jerusalem to descend from heaven to earth, as Revelation describes in the last two chapters of the Bible.

Rather than evacuating or avoiding the earth, we ask God to enter the world—redeeming it, blessing it, healing it. But as we know too well, there's still injustice, evil, and hunger. Yes, God's kingdom is here—but not in its fullness yet.

So when we pray "Thy kingdom come" we're praying for the continued redemption of the world, for the radical defeat and uprooting of evil, for heaven and earth to be integrated. Our prayer is not just for God to do this. Our prayer is also for God to do this through us.

I like how Desmond Tutu put it:

- God, without us—*will not*.
- We, without God—*cannot*.

To pray "Thy kingdom come" is to ask for God's divine help AND to invite God to work through us. God in his grace, baked it into his divine economy that he will not work without human collaboration. God has empowered and ennobled us by the power of the Spirit to be participants in his kingdom work. God brings together not only heaven and earth, but God brings together the human and the divine. The Creator entered into creation. The Word became flesh. And by God's grace, with Christ in us, We shine and show his light and love. offering material sustenance for the hungry and spiritual bread for the world.

When we give our lives to God's service, we believe that Christ's power bursts through our small seeds of faith. Our small acts of love—when they are embedded within God's work—do the impossible.

All you need, says Jesus, is faith the size of a mustard seed, and just a few loaves and fishes. And miraculously the multitudes will be fed—especially the hungry and the vulnerable.

Church, let's be Christ's heart, hands, and feet in the world! Thy kingdom come—starting with us!

Amen.

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